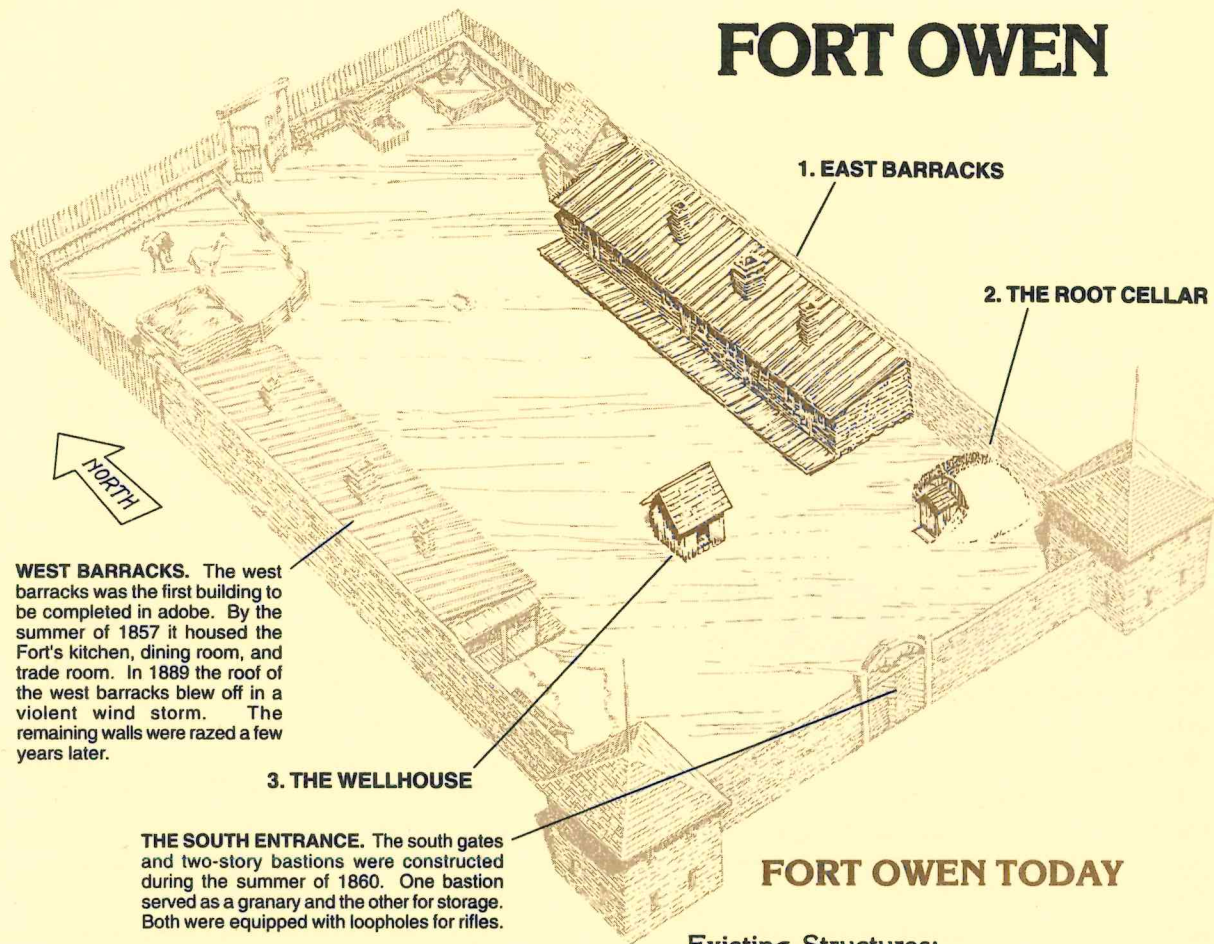


FORT OWEN



WEST BARRACKS. The west barracks was the first building to be completed in adobe. By the summer of 1857 it housed the Fort's kitchen, dining room, and trade room. In 1889 the roof of the west barracks blew off in a violent wind storm. The remaining walls were razed a few years later.

3. THE WELLHOUSE

THE SOUTH ENTRANCE. The south gates and two-story bastions were constructed during the summer of 1860. One bastion served as a granary and the other for storage. Both were equipped with loopholes for rifles.

FORT OWEN TODAY

Existing Structures:

- 1. EAST BARRACKS.** Completed during the adobe reconstruction of 1860, the east barracks contains four separate rooms for distinct uses—Owen's bedroom, his office, the guest room, and the dormitory room.
- 2. ROOT CELLAR.** The root cellar was completed in 1860 and used for food storage. The foundations are all that remain.
- 3. WELL HOUSE.** The original 1860 wellhouse covered a stone-lined shaft from which water was drawn. The present wellhouse is reconstruction based on old photographs and archaeological evidence.

AFTER JOHN OWEN

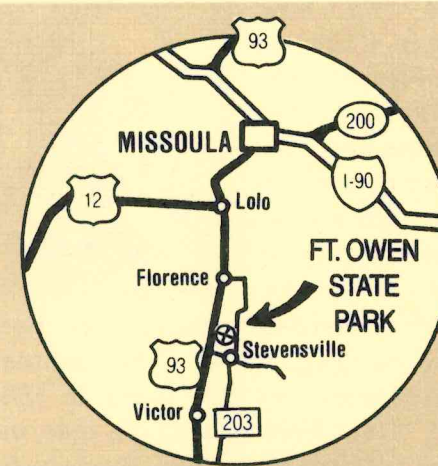
The Fort Owen property was purchased by Washington J. McCormick at a sheriff's sale in 1872. Ironically, McCormick outlived Owen by only a few months.

In 1937 an acre of land enclosing the historic ruins of Fort Owen was donated by the McCormick heirs to the State of Montana to be administered by the State Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks as a State Monument. In 1971 the Monument was entered on the National Register of Historic Places.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

This site is preserved to help us understand a very important and colorful transitional period in Montana's history and that of the entire Northwest. We hope you enjoy your visit and would appreciate your comments.

Because of fire danger, we ask that you please observe the NO SMOKING signs. Thank you.



Fort Owen State Park is administered by:
Montana Department of Fish,
Wildlife and Parks
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, Montana 59801



Special Thanks to Montana State Parks and Wildlife Interpretive Association for their help in funding this project.

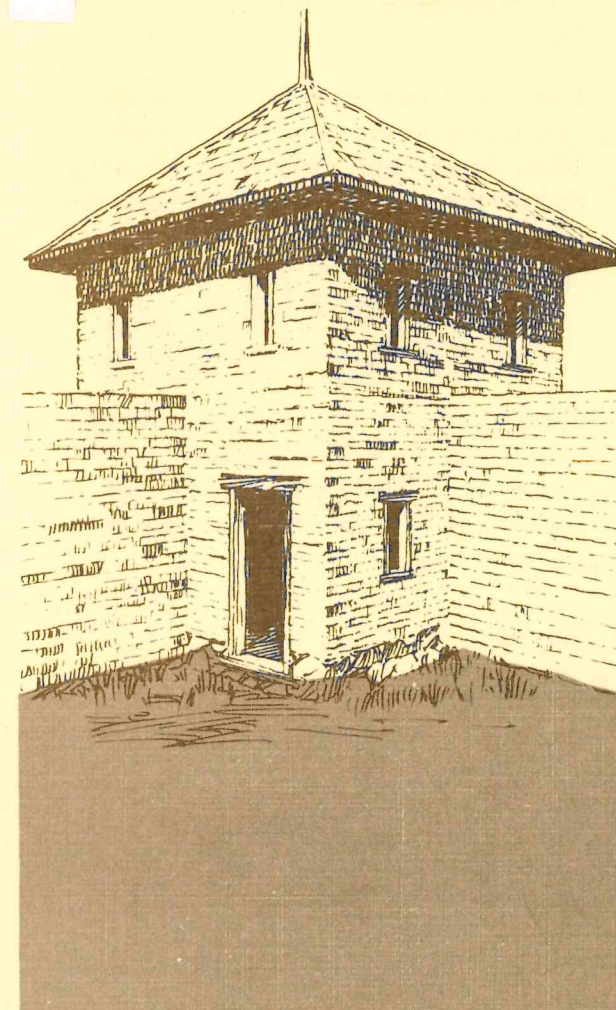
The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks receives federal funds and prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, age, national origin, or handicap. For information or concerns regarding discrimination, contact the Personnel Officer, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 E. Sixth Ave., PO Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701, (406) 444-2535, or the Montana Human Rights Commission, 1236 Sixth Ave., Helena, MT 59620, 1-800-542-0807.

Fort Owen

FORT OWEN STATE PARK



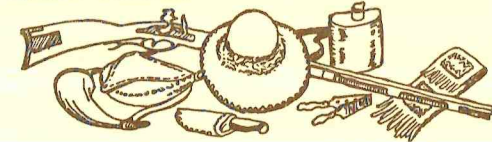
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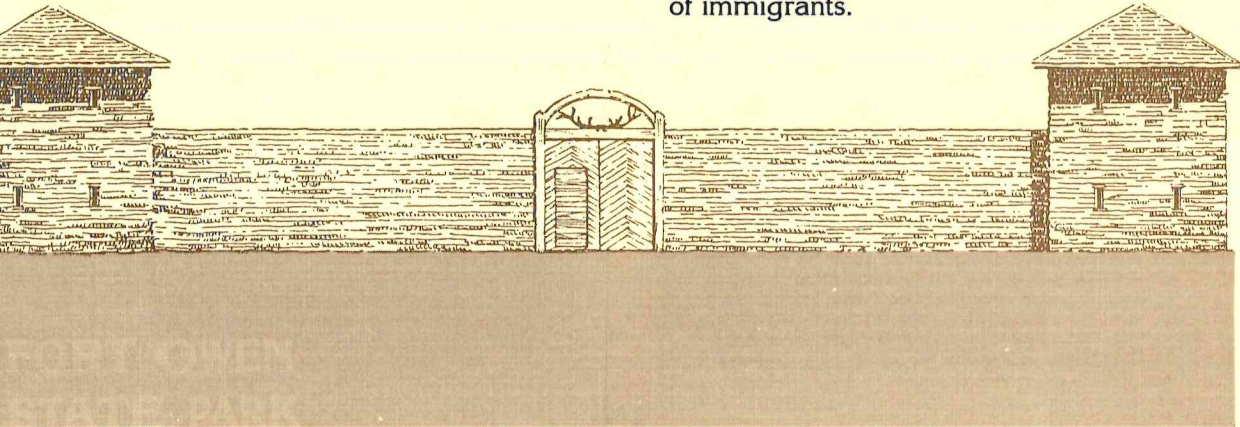
FORT OWEN STATE PARK

Fort Owen State Park in the Bitterroot Valley of western Montana is the site of many "firsts" in the state. It's history intertwines with that of Montana's first Catholic church and is the site of the first permanent white settlement in Montana. The first saw mill, the first grist mill, the first agricultural development, the first water right, and the first school are all credited to the Fort Owen site.

Lewis and Clark passed the future site of Fort Owen on their way to the Pacific in 1805. Soon the entire Northwest was the new fur bonanza for Great Britain and the United States.



Christian Indians from the East brought Catholicism to the Bitterroot Valley. In 1841 Father Pierre Jean DeSmet came here to establish the first Christian Mission in what is now Montana.



The early years at St. Mary's Mission were encouraging and productive. However by the late 1840's the missionaries were beleaguered by lack of funds, apostasy among the converts, and continual harassment from the Blackfeet Indians. In 1850 the Jesuits decided to close St. Mary's temporarily. At this point, John Owen stepped in to Montana history.

JOHN OWEN

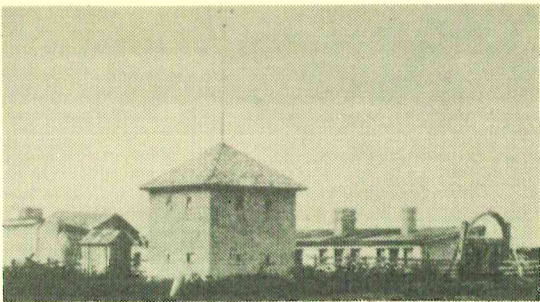
John Owen was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on June 27, 1818. He came west as a licensed trader or sutler with a regiment of United States Mounted



Riflemen, recruited to man military posts along the Oregon Trail. The regiment wintered near Fort Hall, Idaho, in 1849-1850. Near Fort Hall, Owen also met Nancy, a Shoshoni woman whom he formally married in 1858. Owen resigned his sutlership and by autumn of 1850 he arrived in the Bitterroot Valley to begin trading the Indians and the growing numbers of immigrants.

THE AGENCY YEARS

In 1856 John Owen was appointed acting agent to the Flathead Nation and in 1857 the position was confirmed. Fort Owen was the Flathead Agency Headquarters until 1860, when the reservation headquarters was moved north to the Jocko Valley.



As agent Owen had problems with governmental indifference and negligence. He frequently drew on his personal funds and supplies to relieve the bitter hardships for his charges. He was also plagued with pressures from illegal white squatters.

A weary and disgusted John Owen resigned as Flathead Agent in July of 1862.



FORT OWEN TRANSITIONAL YEARS

The decade of the 1860's brought many changes to the Bitterroot Valley. A trading establishment built by Frank H. Worden and C.P. Higgins at Hell Gate Ronde on the recently completed Mullan Road (*west of the present-day Missoula*) competed with Fort Owen. The gold camps provided an outlet for the agricultural produce from the bitterroot, but Fort Owen was no longer the only "bastion of civilization."

After Nancy's death in 1868, Owen's mental health began to deteriorate. Always a social drinker, he now drank heavily and in 1871, diagnosed as suffering from "dementia," Owen was committed to St. John's Hospital in Helena. In 1874 Governor Benjamin Potts declared John Owen legally insane and deported him from Montana Territory. Owen's old friend William Bass accompanied him to Philadelphia, where Owen remained with his family until his death on July 12, 1889.